

REMARKS

Re-examination and allowance of the present application is respectfully requested.

Initially, Applicants note that the Examiner has inadvertently failed to indicate his consideration of the Supplemental Information Disclosure Statement that was filed with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office on January 9, 2004. The Examiner is respectfully requested to return a completed copy of the PTO-1449 form that accompanied the Supplemental Information Disclosure Statement to confirm his consideration of the submitted documents.

Applicants thank the Examiner for indicating that claims 4, 6, 7 and 13-15 contain allowable subject matter, and that these claims would be allowable if they are amended to be placed in independent form. By the current amendment, Applicant amends claim 1 to include the subject matter of objected claim 7. Accordingly, Applicants believe that independent claim 1 and dependent claims 2-6 and 8-15 are allowable over the art of record, and respectfully request such an indication by the Examiner.

In this regard, in view of the current amendment to include the subject matter of objected claim 7 in claim 1, Applicants submit that it is no longer necessary to discuss the appropriateness of the substantive rejection set forth by the Examiner. The current action taken by Applicants should be viewed as a desire to advance the prosecution of the preset application, and not as an acquiescence of the appropriateness of the rejection. Applicants further note that they have revised the claim language of the claims to place them in closer conformance with U.S. patent practice, by, for example, amending the claims to use the phrase “one of” in place of the original claim language “or”.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

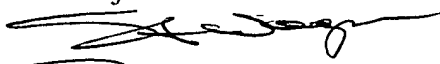

In view of the fact that none of the art of record, whether considered alone or in combination, discloses or suggests the present invention as now defined by the pending claims, and in further view of the above amendments and remarks, reconsideration of the Examiner's action and allowance of the present application are respectfully requested and are believed to be appropriate.

Any amendments to the claims which have been made in this amendment, and which have not been specifically noted to overcome a rejection based upon the prior art, should be considered to have been made for a purpose unrelated to patentability, and no estoppel should be deemed to attach thereto.

Should the Commissioner determine that an extension of time is required in order to render this response timely and/or complete, a formal request for an extension of time, under 37 C.F.R. §1.136(a), is herewith made in an amount equal to the time period required to render this response timely and/or complete. The Commissioner is authorized to charge any required extension of time fee under 37 C.F.R. §1.17 to Deposit Account No. 19-0089.

If there should be any questions concerning this application, the Examiner is requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,
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